

First-time asylum applicants in Germany in 2015: Social structure, level of qualifications and employment

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BAMF Brief Analysis

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First-time asylum applicants in Germany in 2015

Social structure, level of qualifications and employment

by Anna-Katharina Rich

The “SoKo” (“Soziale Komponente” = “social component”) data are collected by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) on a voluntary basis during the first-time asylum application procedure, and amongst other things provide a rough overview of the qualification structure of those seeking protection. This Brief Analysis takes a look at the year 2015.

AT A GLANCE

- “SoKo” stands for “Soziale Komponente” (social component) and includes information on schooling, language knowledge and employment amongst other things. These data are collected by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in the first-time asylum application procedure on a voluntary basis with the aid of an interpreter.
- It should be realised that the explanatory power of the “SoKo” data may be limited. However, they do provide a good overview of first-time asylum applicants’ qualification structure.
- Three-quarters of first-time asylum applicants in 2015 were male, and 68 % of them were aged under 33. Roughly half of them were married. The most common native languages are Arabic, Albanian and Dari/Farsi.
- The highest educational institution which 18 % of first-time asylum applicants in the “SoKo” database had attended was a higher education institution, whilst 20 % had attended a grammar school, 32 % a general secondary school, and 22 % a primary school.
- 7 % had not had any formal schooling. Women lagged behind men in terms of their average level of education.
- Weighting with the recognition rate of the Top 10 countries of origin produces a more positive picture of schooling than previously, meaning that those seeking protection who come from countries of origin with good prospects to remain are better educated than the average.
- Roughly two-thirds of first-time asylum applicants were recently in work, largely in manual jobs or as auxiliaries. Women have a lower employment rate than men. Exceptions to this are female graduates, whose employment rate is very similar to that of men.
- Roughly one-third state that they have knowledge of English language (amongst other languages), next to their native language, whilst only roughly 2 % state that they know any German.

The following sections will provide an overview of the social structure, schooling and occupations most recently exercised, as well as of the knowledge of foreign languages of first-time adult asylum applicants in 2015.

Basic situation

Participation in the labour market is one of the most important aspects of integration. It is vital to have background information regarding the level of qualifications of asylum applicants in Germany in order to obtain a targeted estimate of needs, and thus to be able to plan support measures.

Since information on the qualifications of first-time applicants is not relevant to the asylum procedure, its collection is not obligatory. There is also hardly any such information available from surveys at present. One exception is the survey among 2,800 persons entitled to asylum and recognised refugees in the BAMF's study on refugees¹. According to this study, 70 % of the adult respondents had attended school for between five and 14 years. 13 % can be categorised as "unskilled", and 10 % as "highly-skilled".

Keeping certain restrictions in mind (see Box 1), it is however possible to obtain appropriate background knowledge from "SoKo" regarding the level of first-time asylum applicants' qualifications.

1 Worbs, Susanne/Bund, Eva (2016)

2 This coverage rate may vary slightly as a result of different request dates.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE "SOKO" DATA

Origins

- Administrative statistics, not claiming to be collected according to academic standards

Data collection

- In the first-time asylum application procedure, directly by BAMF staff, with the aid of an interpreter
- Providing the "SoKo" informations is not obligatory, but voluntary as it is not directly relevant to the asylum procedure.

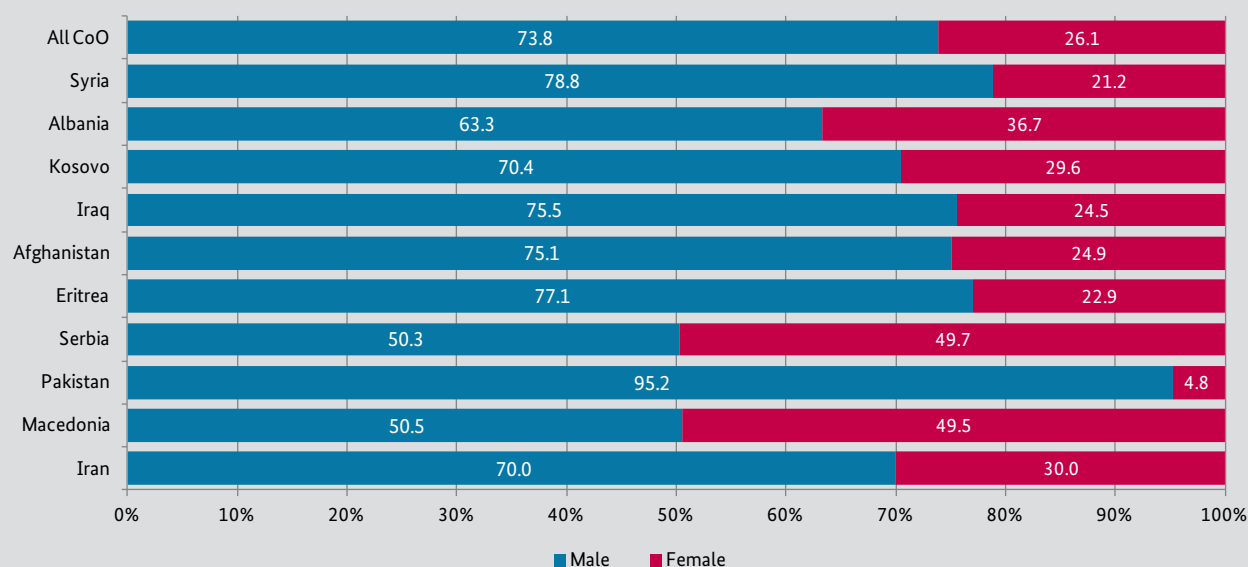
Representativeness

- Large data volume, but no full coverage as statements are voluntary (data on social structure 99.5 %², schooling 72.9 %, occupation last exercised 72.6 %)
- The coverage rate is unproblematic however since respondents' social structure does not systematically deviate from the population.
- Several months' waiting period between entering the country and filing an asylum application may cause the number of individuals recorded in 2015 to deviate from the number of individuals actually resident.

Validity

- Where information is provided voluntarily (without the need to provide proof), strategic responses may be given that are determined by respondents' expectations.
- Difficult to compare school systems and occupational groups from one country to another

Fig 1: Sex of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin (CoO) and from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 302,663; Top 10: n = 242,144 (not including sex "unknown")

The following sections will study both the total of all countries of origin and the ten countries of origin with the largest numbers of adult first-time asylum applicants in 2015 (Syria, Albania, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Serbia, Pakistan, Macedonia and Iran). First-time asylum applicants from the Top 10 countries of origin account for a total of 79 % of all adult asylum applicants in 2015. Almost half (47 %) of first-time asylum applicants from the Top 10 countries of origin come from Syria.

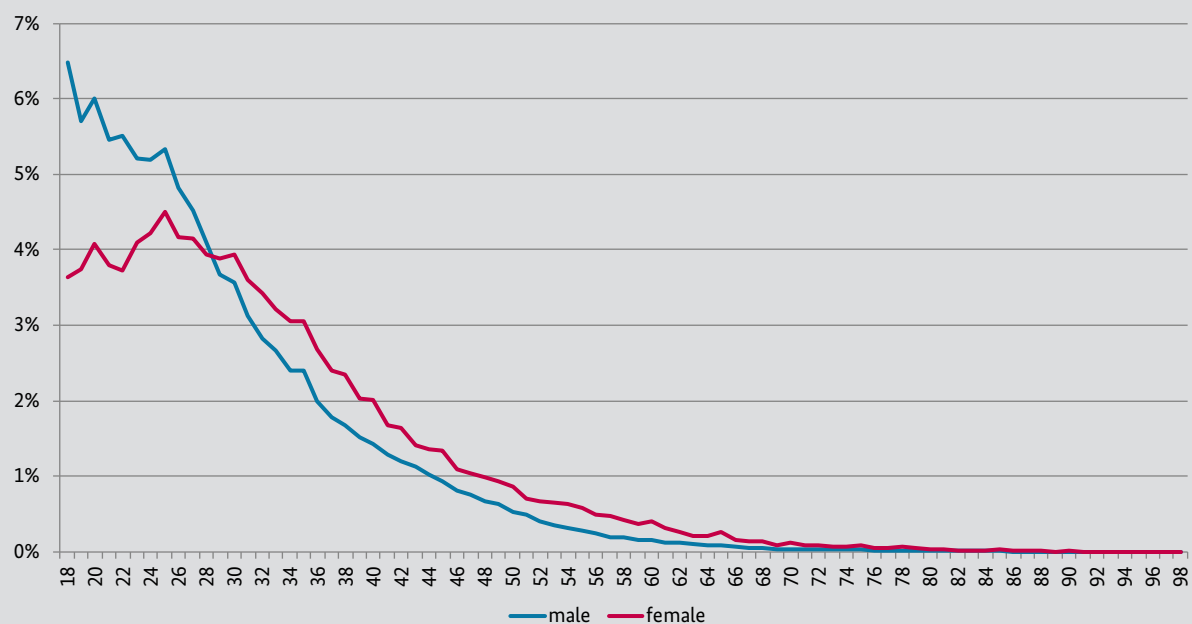
Since the protection rates for asylum applicants from different countries of origin differ greatly, the qualifications of applicants from countries of origin with good prospects to remain (e.g. Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Iran) are particularly

relevant for support measures from an integration point of view (see p. 9).

The social structure of first-time asylum applicants in 2015

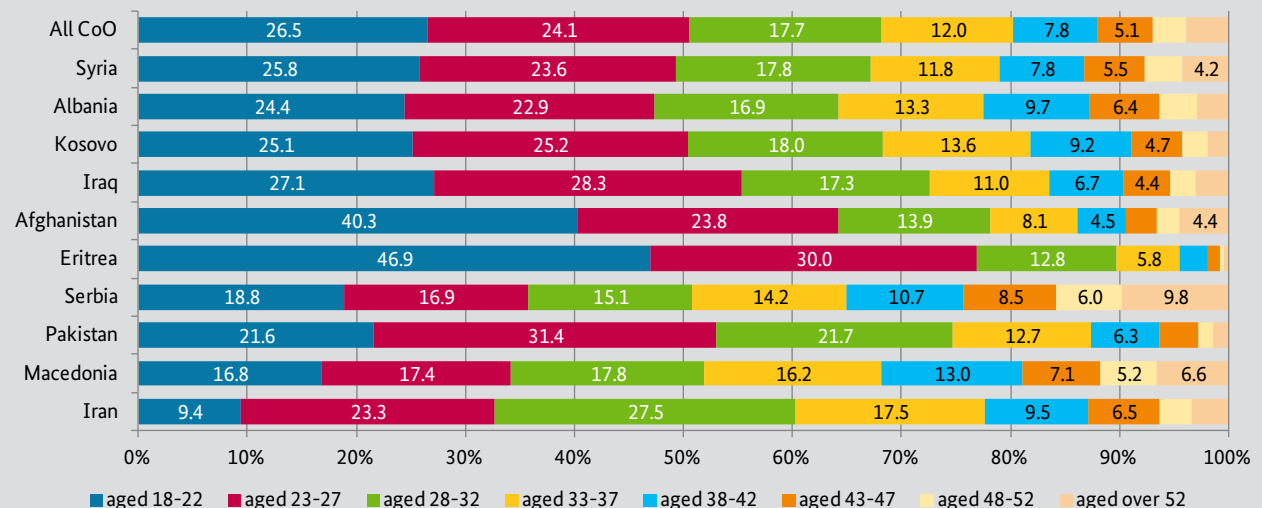
74 % of the adult applicants who were recorded in the “SoKo” database for 2015 are male over all countries of origin, and 26 % are female (Figure 1). 70 to 80 % of the adults from six of the Top 10 countries of origin recorded in “SoKo” are male. When it comes to persons from Macedonia and Serbia, the share of women is above average, at almost 50 %. This also applies to persons from Albania, at

Figure 2: Age of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin by sex in 2015 (in percent)



Source: “SoKo” database, 17 Mar. 2016; n = 303,064 (not including sex “unknown”)

Figure 3: Age categories of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin and from the Top 10 countries of origin by sex in 2015 (in percent)



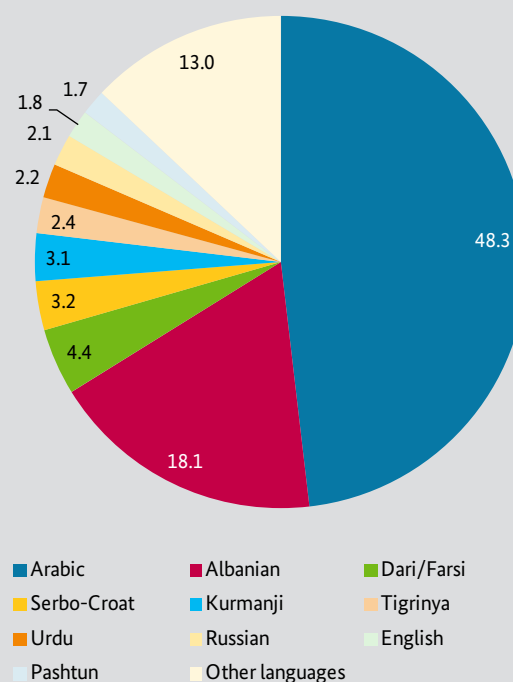
Source: “SoKo” database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 303,285; Top 10: n = 242,292; shares under 4 % are not shown.

37 %. The share of women among persons from Pakistan is far below average, at 5 %. The vast proportion of persons of both sexes is aged below 30. Men have a somewhat younger age structure than women in percentage terms, as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 3 makes it clear that an above-average share of applicants from Eritrea (47 %) and Afghanistan (40 %) are as young as 18 to 22. What is remarkable here is the large share of 18-to-20-year-olds from Afghanistan (23 %), which is not revealed by the graph. It can furthermore be observed that particularly first-time asylum applicants from Serbia, Macedonia and Iran are much older on average.

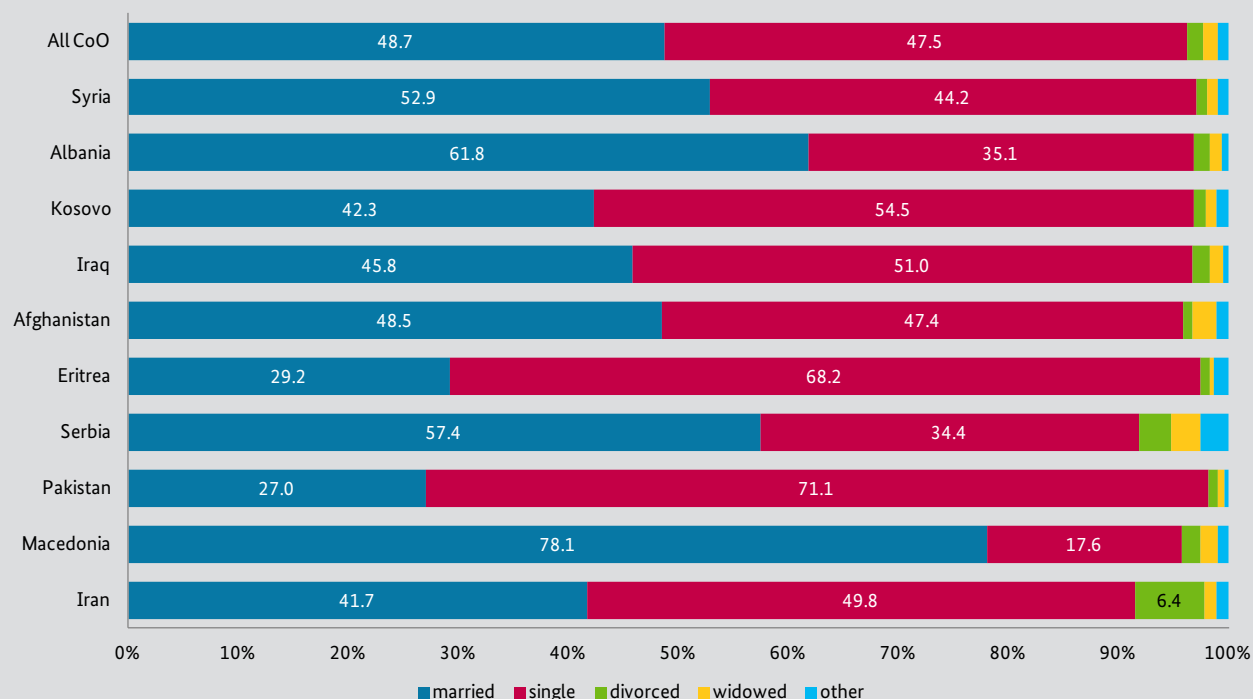
Almost half (48 %) of all respondent first-time asylum applicants stated that they were single (Figure 4). An equal number are married (49 %). More than two-thirds of first-time applicants from Eritrea (68 %) and Pakistan (71 %) are single, whilst roughly the same share of applicants from Albania (62 %) and Macedonia (78 %) is married. These statistics however say nothing about whether the spouses are also in Germany, in another country or have lodged an asylum application at the same time as the respondent. Furthermore, the age structure of first-time asylum applicants from certain countries of origin should be examined together with the civil status.

Figure 5: Native language of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; n = 302,877

Figure 4: Civil status of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin (CoO) and from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 302,877; Top 10: n = 242,292; Shares below 4 % are not shown

RECORDING SCHOOL QUALIFICATIONS

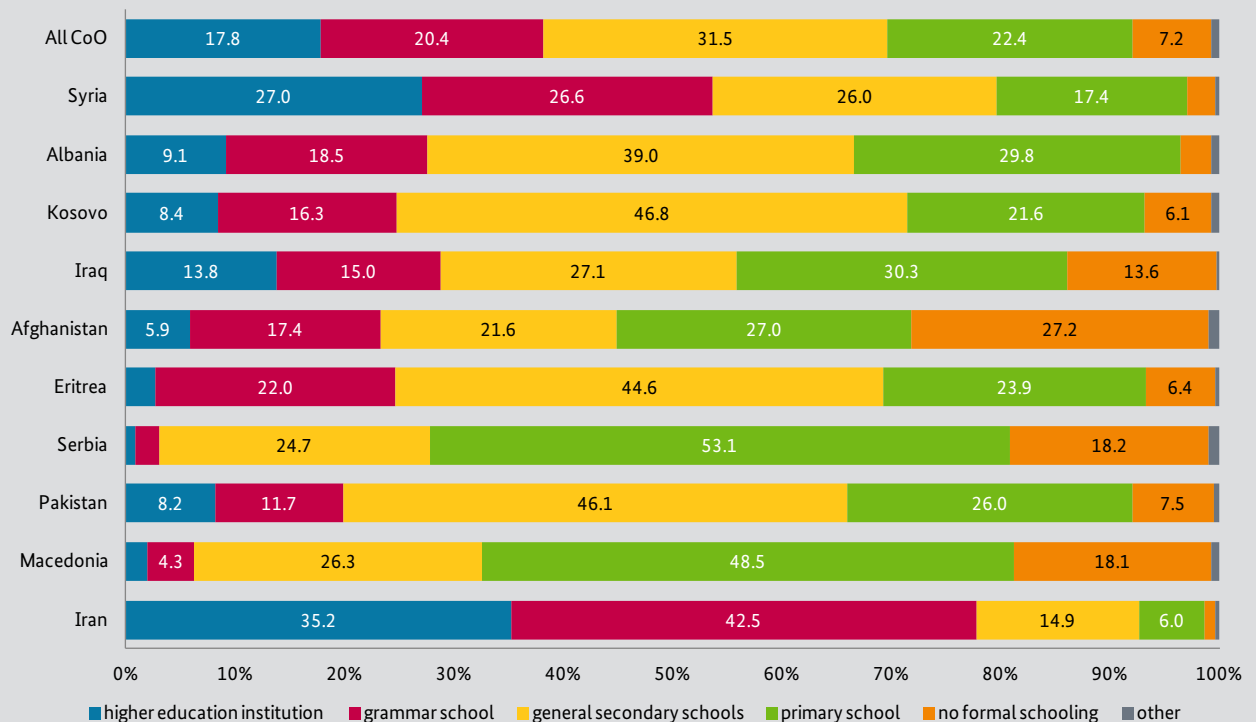
- The question asked: "What was the highest educational institution you attended?" (regardless of whether it was successfully completed and/or a graduation certificate can be presented)
- Coverage rate: 72.9 % of all adult first-time asylum applicants in 2015
- Categories:
 - higher education institution: University, technical college;
 - grammar school: 11 or more years' secondary schooling;
 - general secondary schools: trade and technical school, general secondary school;
 - primary school: up to four years' school attendance;
 - no formal schooling: not literate, did not attend a formal school;
 - other: special school, unknown.
- Methodical restrictions: age limit of 18 is below University entrance age; no conclusions can be drawn as to formal recognition of the educational institution attended.

186 different native languages were spoken among the applicants (Figure 5). The native languages spoken most frequently by first-time applicants are Arabic, which is spoken by 48 %, followed by Albanian at 18 %, and Dari/Farsi with 6 %.

Schooling

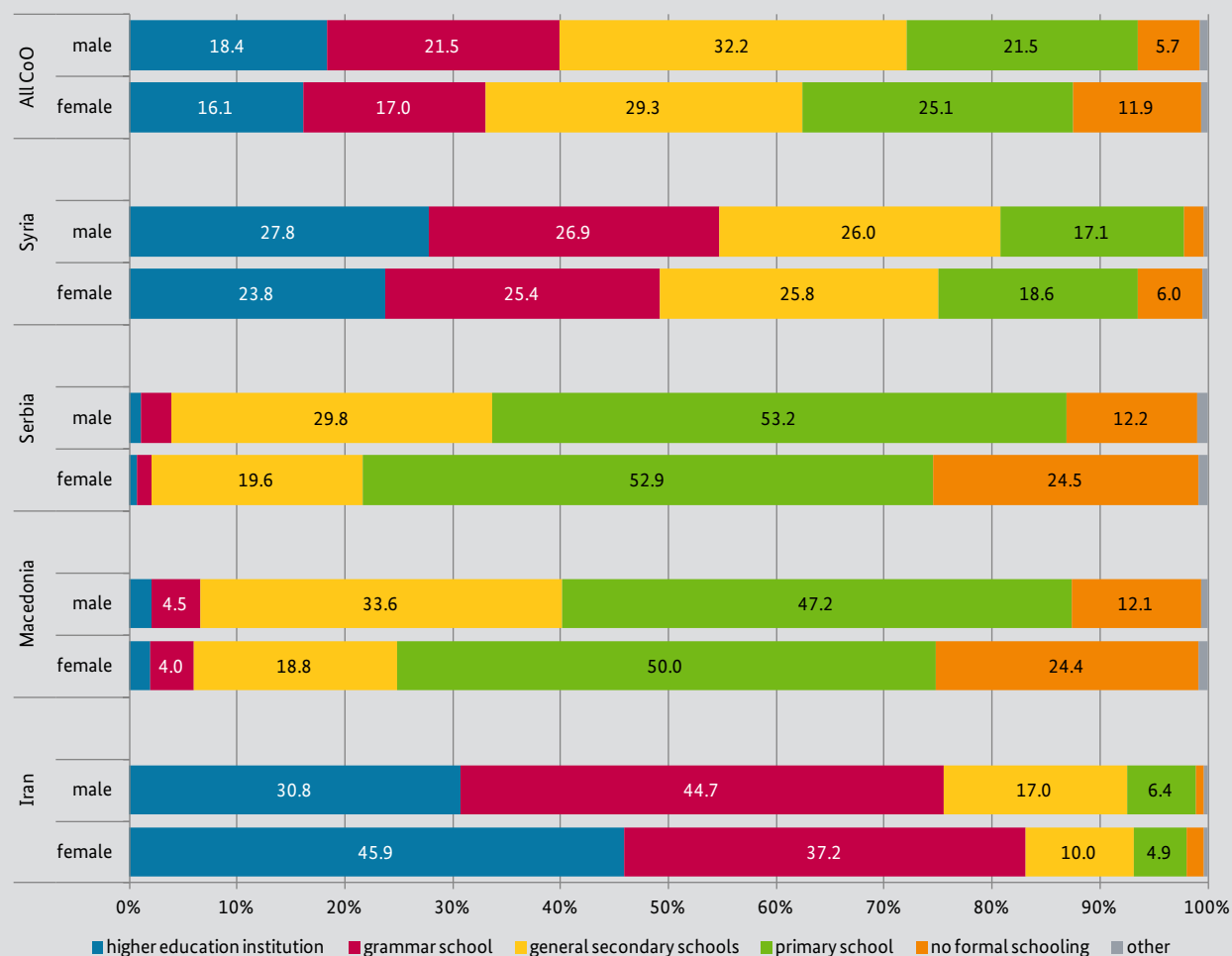
Roughly one-fifth of the respondent first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin had attended a higher education institution, and another fifth had been to a grammar school (Figure 6). Only 7 % had had no formal schooling. But roughly one-fifth had only attended school for a maximum of four years. 32 % stated a general secondary school as the highest educational institution which they had attended. First-time asylum applicants from Iran and Syria had attended university or secondary education to an above-average extent. By contrast, first-time asylum applicants from Macedonia and Serbia had a below-average level of education. The share of persons who have had no formal schooling is above average among immigrants from these countries, as it is among Afghan applicants.

Figure 6: Highest educational institution attended by adult first-time asylum applicants from from all countries of origin (CoO) and from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 222,062; Top 10: n = 174,155; shares below 4 % are not shown

Figure 7: Highest educational institution attended by adult first-time asylum applicants by sex from all countries of origin (CoO) and selected countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 222,062; Syria, Serbia, Macedonia and Iran: n = 101,831 (not including sex "unknown"); shares below 4 % are not shown

Figure 7 shows the data broken down by genders for the countries of origin with schooling distributions which particularly differ from the average. When it comes to applicants from all countries of origin, as well as from Syria, Serbia and Macedonia, the share which attended a higher educational institution is larger among men than among women. By contrast, at 46 % more female applicants from Iran have attended a higher education institution than their male compatriots (31 %).

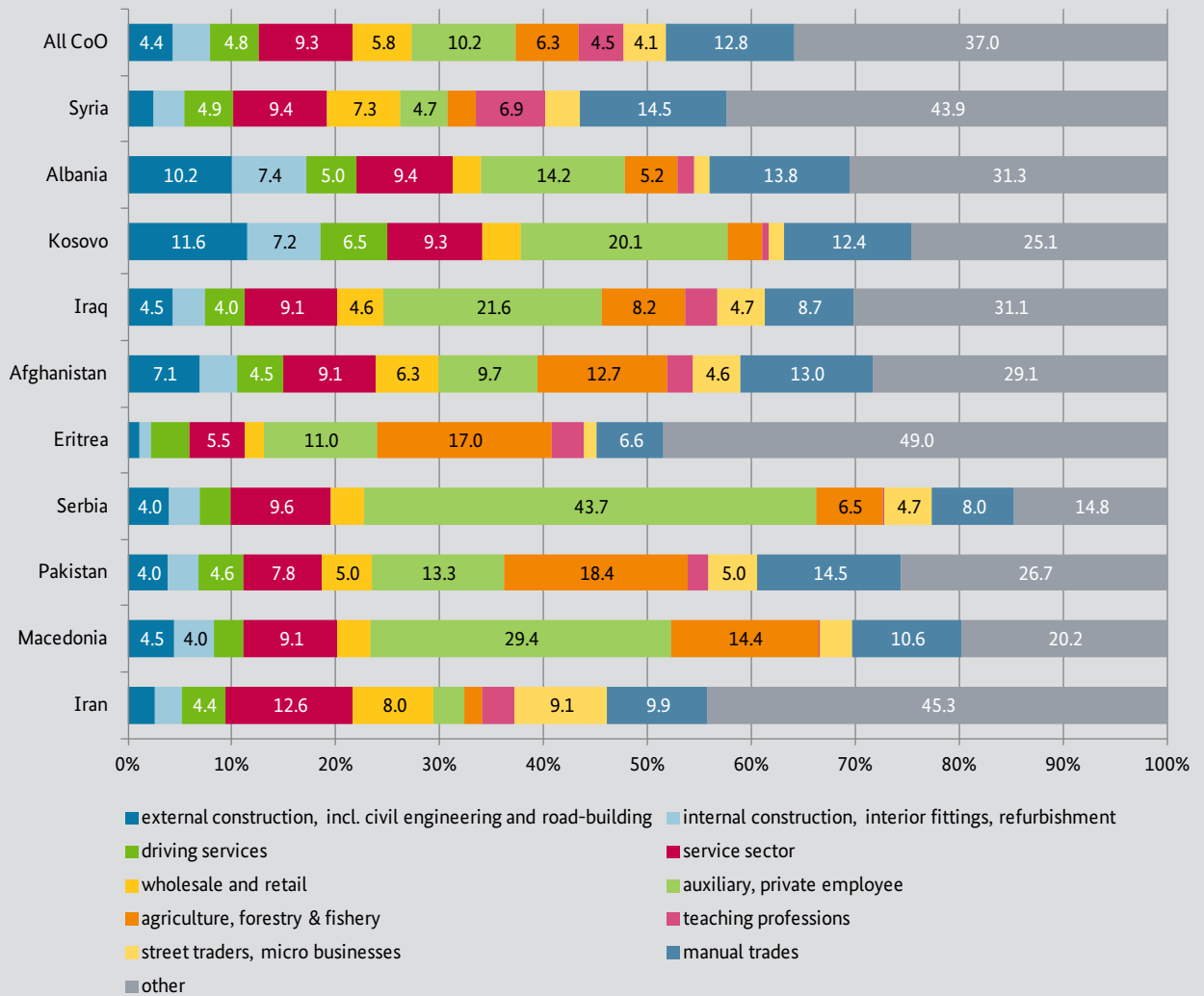
Professions last exercised

Somewhat more than one-third (35 %) of adult first-time asylum applicants in the "SoKo" database recorded from all countries of origin had not been in gainful employment in their country of origin; the rest had recently been in work. Serbia (39 %), Macedonia (41 %) and Kosovo (53 %) deviate

RECORDING THE PROFESSIONS LAST EXERCISED

- The question asked: "What was your last job?"
- Coverage: 72.6 % of all adult first-time asylum applicants in 2015
- Categories: 33 pre-defined categories on professions; not in work: without work, housewife/retired/school pupil/student
- Methodical restrictions: not possible to provide information on the position and the necessary level of qualifications; information frequently only states which sector was worked in, in some cases with overlaps; a disproportionately large number of people aged under 25 are in the category "housewife/retired/school pupil/student", who might still have been in training, and hence not in gainful employment.

Figure 8: Ten most frequent jobs among adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin (CoO) and from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 who were most recently in work (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; all CoO: n = 142,534; Top-10: n = 110,120; shares below 4 % are not shown

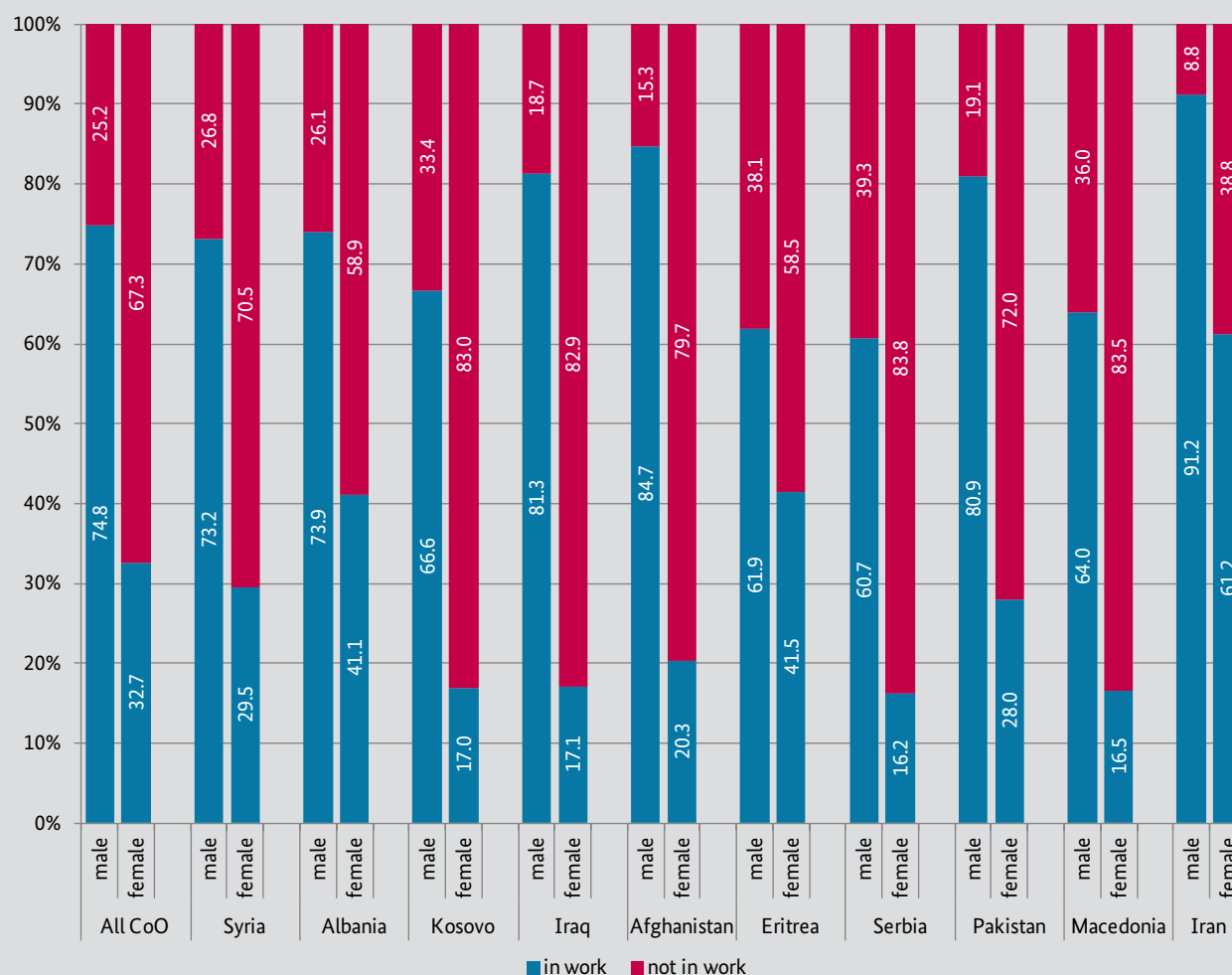
from this pattern, with much lower employment rates, and Iran (82 %) and Pakistan (79 %) deviate with relatively high employment rates. Given the different participation of the genders in working life, it should however also be noted that the vast majority of applicants from Pakistan are men and the share of women, who generally show lower employment rates, is particularly high amongst applicants from Serbia and Macedonia.

Figure 8 shows that, among those in gainful employment of all countries of origin, 13 % were working in a manual trade, followed by 10 % of persons who worked as auxiliaries or private employees. 5 % of all adult applicants had most recently been in teaching. A particularly large share of applicants from Eritrea, Iran and Syria were most recently not working in any of the ten most common occupations shown in figure 8. This picture emerges among first-time asylum applicants from Eritrea as a result of the large share

of persons who most recently worked as a "Soldier, mercenary, professional sportsperson" (35 %), which indicates that Eritrean society is pervaded by the military. A disproportionately large share among applicants from Iran is accounted for by artistic occupations (6 %), engineering (5 %) and administrative occupations (5 %). Applicants of Syrian origin relatively frequently most recently worked in engineering (4 %), artistic occupations (4 %) and medical professions (5%).

Only roughly one-third of the women from all countries of origin, but three-quarters of the men, had most recently been in work (Figure 9). Women from all countries of origin had most recently been concentrated in the service sector or in teaching professions, whilst men primarily worked as auxiliaries or in the manual trades. 66 % of college graduates and 64 % of non-graduates had been in work most recently. Graduate employment was

Figure 9. Most recent gainful employment of adult first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin (CoO) and from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 by gender (in percent)



Source: "SoKo" database, 1 Mar. 2016; all CoO: n = 220,887; Top 10: n = 173,272 (not including sex "unknown")

lower among applicants from Albania, Kosovo, Pakistan and Syria than among non-graduates. Graduate asylum applicants from all countries of origin had most frequently recently exercised teaching professions (18 %), engaged in medical work (11 %) and been in engineering occupations (10 %), whilst graduate applicants from Kosovo had worked most frequently in the hotel trade and in gastronomy. Among graduate applicants from all countries of origin, almost the same share of men and women were in gainful employment, whilst with non-graduates many more men than women had been in gainful employment.

Foreign language knowledge

28 % of first-time asylum applicants from all countries of origin stated that they speak English, whilst only 2 % said that they know any German (Table 1). A particularly large

THE RECORDING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE

- The question asked: "What other languages (apart from your native language) do you speak?" (Knowledge of language Yes/No)
- Coverage: Cannot be unambiguously calculated due to multiple responses.
- Methodical restrictions: No information on level of knowledge, no distinction between oral and written knowledge, possibility of socially-desirable responses

number of Syrian and Iranian applicants, who also have the highest average level of schooling, stated that they speak English. However, a relatively large share of persons from Kosovo, Eritrea and Albania also stated that they speak English, despite a relatively low level of schooling. The share of persons who speak German is however below 3 % in almost all the Top 10 countries of origin. Kosovo constitutes an exception with 20 %.

Table 1: Knowledge of German and English among adult first-time asylum applicants from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)

	Share of persons with knowledge of English	Share of persons with knowledge of German
Alle CoO	28.1	1.8
Syria	41.0	1.1
Albania	26.6	1.4
Kosovo	31.4	19.5
Iraq	14.2	0.4
Afghanistan	14.3	0.6
Eritrea	28.9	0.1
Serbia	3.4	1.9
Pakistan	4.9	0.1
Macedonia	2.0	1.3
Iran	31.3	3.0

Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; n = 97,747

Weighting of the education data with the protection rates of the Top 10 countries of origin

The educational characteristics of applicants from countries of origin with good prospects to remain (e.g. from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Iran) are particularly relevant when it comes to planning integration schemes, as it can be expected that first-time asylum applicants from these countries will very probably remain in Germany. Table 2 visualises how the spread of schooling in the Top 10 countries of origin is redistributed as a result of weighting with the protection rate³ from 2015.

Weighting with the protection rates from 2015 gives rise to a spread which shows a larger share of people with a high level of schooling. This spread is dominated by the proportionately good schooling among Syrians,

Table 2: Highest schooling of adult first-time asylum applicants unweighted and weighted with the protection rate from the Top 10 countries of origin in 2015 (in percent)

Schooling	without weighting	with weighting
University	18.4	23.2
Grammar school	21.7	24.7
General secondary schools	29.7	26.7
Primary school	23.0	19.6
No formal schooling	6.6	5.4
Other	0.5	0.4

Source: "SoKo" database, 3 Feb. 2016; n = 174,155; BAMF (2015)

who with a protection rate of 96 % in 2015 were almost always found to be in need of protection in accordance with the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz). Furthermore, only less than 1 % of persons from Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia, who had a below-average level of education, received protection under the Asylum Act in 2015, so that their weighting is correspondingly lower.

Summary

On average, roughly three-quarters of all adult first-time asylum applicants are men, the majority of whom are aged between 20 and 29 and have attended a general secondary school as their highest educational institution. Women are less well educated than men on average. Roughly one-third of all first-time asylum applicants were not in gainful employment most recently. Just under half the respondents are married. Equally, almost half speak Arabic as their native language.

Syria:

- Good schooling, low percentage without formal schooling
- Roughly one-quarter most recently worked in technical, medical, engineering, teaching and administrative professions.
- Almost half stated that they speak English.

Albania:

- Medium schooling and low rate of persons with no formal education
- Above-average incidence of people who most recently worked in the service or construction sector

Kosovo:

- Relatively few persons with no formal schooling, large share attended general secondary school

3 Protection rates from BAMF (2015). Weighting by multiplying the protection rates of the individual Top 10 countries of origin with their frequencies of the highest educational institution attended.

- Roughly half were not in work most recently, particularly large number of women
- A relatively large number speaks German.

Irak:

- Medium education level
- Age group from early 20-ies most frequent, steep drop in numbers in age groups above this peak
- Relatively large share of women who were most recently not in gainful employment

Afghanistan:

- Very young age structure
- Large share with no formal schooling
- Large share most recently in gainful employment, mainly in the service sector or in agriculture

Eritrea:

- Large share of single young men aged around 20
- More than one-third of those who were most recently in gainful employment worked as soldiers, mercenaries, professional sportspersons and presumably, amongst other things, fled from forced military conscription

Macedonia and Serbia:

(similar characteristics)

- Above-average number of women
- Frequently married, and hence possibly financially responsible for a family
- Low level of education, particularly among the women
- More than one-half were not in gainful employment most recently; those who were in work particularly frequently worked as auxiliaries/private employees

Pakistan:

- Almost exclusively male
- Mid-20 age groups most frequent
- High level of gainful employment, particularly frequent in agriculture

Iran:

- Relatively old and well educated, thus presumably immigration subsequent to completing training
- Very high level of gainful employment, frequently in the service sector, but also in engineering, artistic and administrative professions
- Large share speaks English

Conclusion

The descriptive information presented here on asylum applicants' qualifications permits initial conclusions to be drawn on the respective groups' need for support as to their desired (labour market) integration.

1. The significance of the integration courses

Since only a small share of all first-time asylum applicants already speak German, integration courses and German courses following on from these are particularly important in order to facilitate participation in society and access to working life in Germany.

2. Young first-time asylum applicants

Many of the first-time asylum applicants are of an age at which people have not yet completed their schooling or finished University. This group of applicants should be integrated into the school and University system as soon as possible, which means enabling them to gain qualifications which correspond to the level in Germany, accelerate their language acquisition, as well as promoting cultural and social contacts, and should therefore lay the foundation for successful (labour market) integration.

3. Applicants with medium to good schooling

Even with medium to good schooling, no rapid successes should be anticipated when it comes to labour market integration since the burdens of low vocational qualifications and of language acquisition (may) also apply to people with a good level of schooling. Promotional measures specifically for persons with a good level of schooling who were however previously employed below their abilities can help compensate for shortcomings in vocational training.

4. Applicants with a low level of schooling/no schooling

Persons from Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia and Macedonia frequently have no formal schooling, and hence need more tailored support activities, and may first need help with literacy.

5. The significance of schooling for labour market integration

The level of schooling is not necessarily decisive for the integration into the labour market, given accurately fitting measures of support. Practical vocational training may even make it easier to take up work, and should hence be considered when it comes to support measures.

6. Women

Given the different starting situations with regard to the pre-existing schooling and work experience of women and men, greater account should be taken of the needs of women. Women from all countries of origin are more commonly affected by illiteracy, or by a very low level of schooling. A larger number of literacy courses for women should therefore be offered. Support measures on acquiring a (first) job specifically for women may also appear expedient given their low employment rate.

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